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THE
C A S E
OF THE
T H I E F
ON THE
C R O S S
CONSIDERED,
As made an
ENCOURAGEMENT
TO A
Death-bed Repentance.

K
By THOMAS NEWMAN.



L O N D O N:

Printed for R. HETT, at the *Bible and Crown* in
the *Poultry*; and J. WAUGH, at the *Turk's-Head*
in *Lombard-Street*. MDCCLI.

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THE
CASE
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HOUGH the principle of self love is very deeply laid, and works very strongly in the humane frame; though we have all the advantages that we can wish, both from reason and revelation, for the directing it to its *designed* end, even our safety and happiness; yet it is one of the hardest things in the world to prevent a self-deception: nor is there any thing in which mankind are more *willingly* deluded, or take more *pains* to cheat and impose upon themselves, than in matters where the

error is most fatal if persisted in, and may very soon and suddenly be past correcting. This is sadly verified with respect to what *all*, who believe that there is a Governor and Judge of the world, acknowledge to be *indispensibly* necessary to secure his favour and acceptance; that is, *repentance*. Whilst the great importance thereof is *in words* confessed, and the misery consequent upon, and adjudged to, the leaving of this world destitute of it, is owned, yet alas! how many *under this conviction* live regardless of the most awakening calls to repentance, and unmoved amidst the most alarming denunciations against impenitency. One of the chief causes hereof I apprehend is, "an indeterminate purpose of repenting before they die:" by which, I fear, is generally, if not always, meant by those who form it, *the* season when they are *actually* leaving the world, and can no longer *sin*, any more than live. The main ground upon which the apprehended sufficiency of *such* a repentance rests, the foundation on which the hopes of its acceptance are built, seems to be the instance we have in the Gospel, commonly described by that of *the thief upon the cross*. Of this only one Evangelist, St. *Luke*, hath given us any *circumstantial* or *particular* account: which is this, "That this malefactor did meet with a very *full assurance* of acceptance and favour from our blessed
" Lord,

“ Lord, and in *his last moments too*, upon an
 “ application *then* made to him for mercy.
 “ When this criminal, who had but a *very*
 “ *little time to live*, and was suffering death
 “ for his *evil deeds*, put up a prayer to the
 “ Saviour of the world for his gracious re-
 “ gards in those words, *Lord remember me*
 “ *when thou comest into thy kingdom*; he was
 “ answered by a very solemn promise of
 “ speedy happiness: *Jesus said unto him,*
 “ *verily I say unto thee, to day shalt thou be*
 “ *with me in paradise* †.” This is acknow-
 ledged to be the sacred historian’s account,
 and excepting a very few circumstances res-
 pecting his companion that was crucified
 with him, this is *all* the account that we
 have of this malefactor.

From this passage many professed Christi-
 ans have *promised* themselves and others
 the favour of God, and the mercy of our
 Lord Jesus *unto eternal life* upon a *very late*
 repentance; even upon that which *sick* and
dying circumstances will admit of. They
 have grounded this conclusion upon it, and ac-
 ted upon it, “ that all that is necessary to sal-
 vation may be done in a very little time before
 we die, and be as *effectually* secured *then* by an
 application for mercy, accompanied with sor-
 row, as at *any other* time, however they have
 lived all their days.”

This

† Luke xxiii. 42, 43.

This appears to me a most deadly engine for the destruction of souls; a most fatal opiate; a wretched stratagem to unite and reconcile the widest extreams of moral character and condition; even those, of indulgence to wickedness and the hopes of salvation; a living to the Devil and a dying to the Lord. One would wonder how any who are acquainted with the Gospel and conduct themselves by it; who are able to discern a contradiction and would not blaspheme the son of man, should ever ground such a notion upon this passage, which upon the least consideration must appear a gross and palpable abuse, and a conclusion most *contrary* to our Lord's intention. To evidence this, I would make the following remarks on this passage of scripture.

1. Remark. It lies in the Gospel, I think, merely, as *history* or as a matter of *fact*; and was not, as far as I can see, *intended* by our Lord to convey any *moral instruction*. It is acknowledged, that our Saviour frequently made use of parables, similitudes, and representations, for the conveying some doctrine, for the establishing some truth that he had been inculcating, or for the illustrating the reasonableness or unreasonableness of some particular behaviour for the encouragement or the exposing of those with whom he had to do. But this *before us* is no parable, nor any thing of that kind: but

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is a relation of *facts*, merely *circumstantial* in the account of our Lord's crucifixion. *His suffering with two malefactors*, we are told by one of the historians, was recorded with *design*: namely, to evidence the fulfilment of that prophecy concerning him, *that he should be numbered with transgressors*, or that he should suffer with criminals §. This is warrant sufficient for us to draw that instruction from it. But the Gospel is altogether silent as to any *design* in its recording the particular circumstance of this malefactor's application to our Lord, and his reply to him. It only historically relates, "that one of the thieves, whilst he hung upon the cross, prayed to our Lord to remember him, and that he assured him of an happiness after death." There is not the least intimation, that he intended thereby to teach us any doctrine, to lay down any rule or instruction for us, or to give us any clue or direction to draw any inference from thence for our own conduct: much less to *authorise* us to ground and raise that doctrine upon it, which, as far as I know, no one pretends to support by any other passage, namely, that the repentance which may be exercised in sick or dying circumstances, and in the last stage of life, may be *fully* sufficient and *absolutely* effectual for obtaining the mercy of God unto salvation, whatever the disposition and life

life had been *till then*. Well, but if this is the truth as to the passage itself, it may be there is ground for asserting the validity of a death-bed repentance from its connection with other circumstances in the history. In answer to that I would remark

2. It doth not appear to me that it was *immediately* the *repentance* of this malefactor that recommended him to mercy. The evangelist *Luke* is the only one who gives us the particulars of the case: and all that he recites that looks *like repentance* in this criminal is only, "that he rebuked his companion as impious in reviling our Lord, and reproached him for his stupidity in being insensible of his own circumstances as a dying criminal; at the same time acknowledging his own just desert of the punishment that he himself was suffering †." Surely, no one that knows what Gospel repentance is, will dare, *merely* from these circumstances, to pronounce his repentance to be genuine; much less to be so very peculiar and singular, as upon *that account* to obtain from our Lord the grant and assurance of happiness which he gave him: and this is all that we know of his penitent disposition and behaviour. If he is considered as a penitent, it can only be *supposed*, since it is *not declared*: much less have we any light or instruction from thence to satisfy our minds,

† Luke xxiii. 39, 40, 41.

minds, what *degree* of the penitent disposition and behaviour is necessary and will be sufficient for a sinner's finding mercy, under dying circumstances. If what is *related* of him be *sufficient* (and all beyond the history is bare surmise and conjecture) none need fear miscarrying but those who die stupidly or suddenly.

But I humbly think that he doth not stand recorded as a *penitent*: this is not the light in which he is represented. If so, there is not a shadow of reason to ground the acceptance of a late repentance upon it; nor have such penitents any thing to do with it. The grant of happiness made to him was immediately consequent upon his requesting to be remembered by Christ in his kingdom: but I see not any thing of *repentance* expressed therein: it is only a general desire of being made happy with him, or by him; which in itself amounts to no more, than a preference of happiness to misery, and that he had an opportunity of putting up a *Lord have mercy upon me*: but who will say that this is an evidence of repentance *sufficient to expect it*?

Should it then be asked, what was it in this *dying* criminal's case, that was the ground and reason of our Lord's solemn assurance of happiness to him?

I answer: "it was in general, the noble and publick acknowledgment and confession

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that

that he made of our Lord's claims and character, at a season when the one was universally disowned and vilified, and the other loaded and blackned by the most ignominious aspersions and treatment." More particularly.

" He avowed his belief of our Lord's pretensions as the son of God and the Messiah that should appear, when he was seemingly forsaken of God, and born down by the common vote and cry, as a deceiver and impostor. He knew that the death which our saviour died in common with him and his companion, was the most ignominious one; and thereby he was degraded to a level with himself: but under this mark of infamy, this sign of the greatest demerit, which was *intended* to leave the most detestable impressions on the minds of the people, to sink his reputation and to suppress all regards towards him, this malefactor proclaims his dignity and his innocence. He acknowledged his royalty in the highest sense in which he had claimed it, at a season when he was suffering for that very claim, and actually treated upon that very account as a most notorious deceiver and impostor, in order to deter any from owning him. He placed his hope on him as entering upon a glory and a kingdom, and upon his power to make his followers and friends happy with him, of which number he desired to be one; yea and to be

be no happier than this crucified Lord could render him."

I apprehend it was this *illustrious* and *singular testimony* bore to the blessed Jesus, at so *peculiar* a season, when his circumstances conspired to discourage all faith, hope, and trust in him, that was the ground of that favour and assurance of acceptance that he received from our Lord. Herein this dying criminal exceeded the Apostles themselves. But what resemblance is there between this triumphant faith in and confession of the divine character of the Lord Jesus; and the remorse, tears, and cries of sick-bed penitents? How noble and generous the one, how selfish the other! It may be left with every impartial mind to determine, which is likely to have most of the convert and christian in it: which exhibits the strongest evidence of the change and religion of the *heart*. And hereupon I think it is as easy to see, why such a behaviour as this dying malefactor's might procure him the promise of mercy and favour, whilst the death-bed penitent may justly look upon his hopes thereof at the most as very precarious and uncertain. The act of the one is widely different from that of the other, and therefore cannot be a precedent for the encouragement of the latter.

But here it may be suggested: was not this faith and confession of the malefactor born and made *just when* he was leaving the

world? was it not in the *very article of death*? Why then may not a *repentance*, exercised at *such* a season, be as certainly owned and rewarded by favour and mercy at this day, since we are assured that forgiveness is annexed in the Gospel to repentance? If that circumstance of the criminal's *faith*, it's *being late*, and *not till his last moments*, did not prevent its acceptance, why should a *late repentance* be rejected and invalid upon that account? This leads me to another remark which, I think, will be a full answer thereto.

3. The *wide difference* in the *circumstances* of this malefactor and our's, renders his faith and our repentance *essentially* different, though they should be both *late*, or *equally near* the close of life. The history saying very little of this criminal, we can enter no further into his circumstances than *probabilities* go.

Now it appears *probable* to me, that he was a Jew, from our Lord's representing to him a future happiness under the term of *paradise*, which would have been understood only by one of that nation, as it was familiar only to them.—It is also probable, that he knew nothing of Christ but by common fame; which being modelled and given out to the common people by the Rulers and Pharisees, to whose sentiments they were enslaved, he had imbibed the prejudices which they laboured to instil against our Lord, and from thence never troubled himself about him

him.——It is also a plausible conjecture, that it was but a little while before his crucifixion, that he could in his situation obtain a *true* knowledge of our Saviour's character, or the evidences of his pretensions; and that he was put upon this enquiry from an intimation that he was to be crucified with him. This is *certain*, that he had obtained such a knowledge of our Lord's pretensions and proposals, and had so seriously weighed them, as to come out to execution *prepared and determined* to confess him, and to avow himself his disciple: this he publicly did upon the *first* opportunity that he had, after his conviction, of declaring his faith and trust in him, which was when hanging on a cross, and in the close of life —— Thus it is *highly probable*, that as soon as he *could* attain to the knowledge of Christ, he believed in him: it is also *certain* from the history, that he thereupon did in a very singular manner *evidence* his faith in him, in the *only* way, and upon the *first opportunity*, that offered for it; which *happened* to be just before he left the world: and upon this he was assured of mercy and favour.

If this was the true state of this criminal's case, with what colour of reason can any death-bed penitents *amongst Christians* pretend to draw this example into a rule or encouragement to themselves, in respect of the mercy and acceptance of God? What resemblance

blance of circumstances is there between *his*
faith in Christ upon his first attaining the
 knowledge of his true character, and his evi-
 dencing his faith by one illustrious act, which
 was *all he could do*; and *our professed* faith in
 him, accompanied with a *practical denial* of
 that profession, amidst a *long succession* of op-
 portunities and engagements for the testify-
 ing the sincerity of our faith? How wide is
 the difference between his being *brought to*
the very knowledge of Christ just before he
 died, and our putting off our repentance,
 which we acknowledge indispensibly necessa-
 ry unto that very time? Though they are
 both *late*, yet they are far from being the
same things, even in *that respect*: since in the
 case of the malefactor it was *accidentally*, in
 ours it is *designedly*, late: in him it was in a
 good degree *unavoidable*, in us it is matter of
choice: he *could not* believe in Christ for
 want of knowing him, we *will not* repent
 from a resolved indulgence to iniquity, soon-
 er. From this view of the two cases, he is
 so far from appearing a *late penitent*, that in
 reality, his situation being considered, he was
 an *early convert*; since it is probable that his
 faith in Christ, and his profession of it, by
 avowing a discipleship to him, though at *the*
close of life, was the improvement of the *first*
opportunity he had of obtaining the know-
 ledge of him, and the effect of his *first con-*
victions of the truth of his character, and the
 vali-

validity of his pretensions. But what consolation can they extract, from the favour that he found from hence, who defer their repentance to the last, at the expence of many convictions, the loss of many opportunities for it, and a resolved disregard of many calls and invitations to it?

4 Remark. We have not a sufficient acquaintance with this malefactor, to qualify us for drawing any conclusion in favour of a sick-bed repentance, from what he found at the last. The history is absolutely silent as to his circumstances and character *before his crucifixion*, excepting that he had been a thief. How egregiously *rash* and *presumptuous* then is it, to make him an example or precedent to ourselves, or to propose him as such to others! How much out of character is it, for Christians to rest such an event as the obtaining eternal salvation, upon the reception that he met with from our Lord, whilst we are so much in the dark as to his *situation* for advantages, his *habitual* course and conduct, upon which the guilt of our acts, and the goodness or badness of our moral character, greatly depends. We can only *conjecture* in his case, as I hinted before; and *probabilities* seem to me to be *all against* those who take or give encouragement from this instance, as to the validity of a late repentance. But supposing it were otherwise, since all that can be suggested as to the

the *particulars* of his character, can amount to no more than *conjecture*, it is madness to build *any hope*, much more to ground *all* our expectation, of the divine favour upon such guesses and surmises, where the greatest certainty and surest foundation is necessary, and may be obtained.

The history stiles him a *malefactor*, or evil-doer, and very deservedly, as it tells us his crime was robbery. It was a crime, for which he himself acknowledges death was a due reward *. But we are not informed whether this was a *practice* and *way of life*, or whether it was the *first* fact of that kind, or whether he had been guilty of any other that was notorious. It might be his *first* fact for any thing that his punishment, infamous as it was, saith to the contrary. Under our uncertainty as to this particular, it is very presumptuous and bold to apply this instance for the encouraging the hope of any who, we know, have *lived* in and *followed* such practices, when, for ought any one knows, the cases are widely different. If it was this malefactor's *first* fact, though it was in itself of an heinous nature, and might, from some circumstances, be greatly aggravated, and though the safety of the community rendered it necessary that he should be made an example before men, yet he might not *need that* repentance that some others may do, who

* Luke xxiii. 41;

who are not chargeable with a crime like his. I am persuaded in my own mind, that a general habit of irreligion, a general disregard to sin and duty, a walking in the ways of the heart, and in the sight of the eyes, or an habitual devotedness to the gratifying inclination and appetite, though by some means or other it should not be attended with what the world accounts scandalous, may evidence a much more degenerate mind, and be the contracting a much greater degree of guilt, than any *particular single* act of iniquity may carry in itself.

Every one must allow that there are some circumstances that greatly alleviate crimes in the sight of God and man, though the justice of a nation hath no regard to them. Such are the being thrown very young upon the wide world; the having no education; no overseer, guide, and instructor; the being early exposed to all that which poverty, or the worst of company, can drive to. — These and such like circumstances, I say, are reasonably allowed to extenuate the guilt of crimes in the eye of God, whilst their contraries greatly aggravate them. Whether the one or the other of these was the case of this malefactor, we are absolutely ignorant; though surely it is necessary that we should know it, before we can judge of his character as a criminal; before we can say what repentance was necessary for him to exercise; and, consequently,

sequently, before we can have any rational foundation for hope of mercy, from what he found. Unless it was a similar or like-case to our own, what conclusion can we draw from it in our own favour? And it can be stiled only a like-case, from the sameness of circumstances in respect of his guilt and repentance; as to both which we are absolutely in the dark.

5 Remark. There is nothing in the history to lead us to believe, that he sinned upon a *presumption of mercy at last*, or upon a *dependance upon a late repentance*. This, I apprehend, makes a wide difference in his case from theirs, who take any encouragement to persist in the practice of vice from the favour that he experienced; *supposing*, but not granting, that he stands *recorded* upon the account of his *contrition and sorrow for his sins*. The continuing in iniquity upon the reserve of a death-bed repentance, is in itself an aggravation of the crimes committed upon that encouragement: for in just construction, it is sinning that grace may abound; it is a vilifying and depreiating the divine favour, as if it was obtainable upon the slightest terms; and representing that repentance, which the wisdom and holiness of God hath fixed upon as the indispensable condition of his forgiveness, to be consistent with a life of iniquity. But is there the least hint of such a presuming upon mercy in this male-

malefactor's case, including such reflections upon the governor and judge of the world as these? Supposing therefore that he did find favour at last, so he might, and yet we have no reason from thence to conclude that we shall, if from the vilest abuse of the divine mercy either manifested *to him*, or in general displayed and insured in the Gospel, we persist in impenitency, from the easiness of obtaining favour and forgiveness from God, against the loudest calls, invitations, and demands of a *speedy* repentance, till we can indulge to vice no longer.

These observations, when taken together, amount, I think, to a satisfying proof, that there is nothing in the account which the Evangelist gives us of this dying malefactor, that can give the least encouragement to professed but wicked Christians, to hope for the acceptance of their death-bed repentance. It was never recorded with any such design: the two cases have nothing of a resemblance between them, upon which to ground an expectation of mercy on the part of such Christians; since they never can be in the circumstances in which he was. How can they then with any reason promise themselves the favour that he found, or make him any rule or example to themselves?

To what I have suggested from the *relation itself* as it stands in the Gospel, from whence we derive all our knowledge of it, I would

subjoin a few arguments from the *reason and nature of the thing*, in confirmation of the conclusion I have drawn from the account itself; namely, that it yields not the least foundation for an hope or trust in the validity of a late repentance: much less was it intended to *establish* that notion. Now,

1. This is the *only* passage that can with any colour be brought from the Gospel in favour of the efficacy and sufficiency of such a repentance. This appears to me to be a very strong argument, that such an application of this instance was not only *besides*, but *contrary to*, our Lord's intention. It is allowed by Christians, that the Gospel is a perfect rule of faith and practice, the charter of hope and happiness: that it is intended and calculated to answer that very momentous question, to the satisfaction of every honest enquirer; "How we may be restored to the favour of our offended Sovereign, and obtain mercy and pardon under a desert of punishment and condemnation." Now, if this is a just representation of the general design of the Gospel, it is very strange, and to me unaccountable, that if a *death-bed repentance* was sufficient for the obtaining those inestimable privileges, that so very concerning a truth should not be as *fully declared*, and as *frequently insisted on*, as *all other* important doctrines of the Gospel are, for the assurance of the timorous, and the satisfaction of

of the doubting. On the contrary, it is left to be *wholly* infered by *consequence*, and from a *single, short, historical, relation* too. Can it be supposed that in a scheme, in which such a stress is laid upon repentance, and such issues are declared to depend upon it, that, if *this* repentance might be relied upon as sufficient, there would not be much stronger ground for our trust therein, and that we should not find it declared to be effectual in many other places?

In our Lord's answer to this malefactor's prayer, a *future state of bliss* after this life is plainly asserted, when he assures him, that he should be with him *in Paradise*. But had this been the *only* place wherein this truth had been taught, it might reasonably have been doubted and disputed: since it could not be supposed that a doctrine so interesting, upon which the hope, the consolation, and behaviour of mankind so much depends, would be passed over in so cursory a manner, or left to be determined by and rest upon one *single* expression, *occasionally* used, without any mark of its being *designed* to instruct us in any truth.

This relation then being the *only* passage throughout the Gospel, as far as I know, that seems to countenance the validity of a death-bed repentance, there is the highest probability that it was not intended to convey any such notion, or to teach any such doctrine.

And

And that this is the truth will be undeniable, if we consider

2. That should our Lord by this instance of the thief upon the cross *design* to assure us, that a sinner, who had lived all his days in a known and presumptuous violation of the divine laws, might lay a claim to the pardon and favour of the Gospel covenant upon the repentance that he exercises at the *close of life*, he would absolutely defeat the very design of the Gospel, frustrate his own end as the revealer of it, and become actually the minister of sin.

The grace of God, or the Gospel, hath appeared, bringing salvation to all men: as a perfect rule of life and manners, it insists also upon our *denying*, or forsaking, *ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.* By this means it proposes to qualify us for the salvation it brings. These are the standing conditions of our obtaining of it, and consequently they are the measures by which the Judge of the world will proceed in conferring it. The Gospel is intended at once to prepare us for it, and entitle us to it: by delivering us from the vassalage and dominion of sin, by the crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts, by cleansing us from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit; and hereupon to transform us by the renewing of the mind, to translate our affections to things
above,

above, to render us a peculiar people, distinguished by our walking-worthy of God unto all pleasing, and perfecting our holiness through his fear. But, if amidst all these express declarations as to the *design* of the Gospel and its great revealer, the instance before us warrants us to rely upon a death-bed sorrow and remorse as sufficient for salvation, it is directly making them all void: it is justifying us in our disregard of them, since an expedient is hereby found out to answer the same purpose as our attending and practising according to those injunctions. Upon this supposition it is undeniable, that the Gospel is at variance with itself; that our Lord hath defeated his own design as the world's great reformer; since he hath left us at full liberty to act as we will, *until* we come to die: and *then* hath insured our acceptance, if we are but capable of lamenting our folly, and of imploring mercy. But can that be a doctrine or privilege of the Gospel, which in its immediate consequence and influence destroys the very Gospel itself in its *main* design, and eventually promises the reward of the penitent to the worker of iniquity? Surely none can believe this, but such as are prepared to swallow any deception for the sake of continuing in their sins!

3. The repentance which an expiring or closing life will admit of, falls greatly short of that to which the Gospel hath annexed salvation.

salvation. As sinners we need the mercy of God to save us from his displeasure: upon what terms he will bestow it, he only can assure us. This he hath done by that inestimable blessing, the Gospel of his grace; in that he hath in the plainest and strongest manner connected the remission of sins with repentance. He who hath settled this connection, hath also particularly *described* the repentance that shall secure this happy issue, to prevent our mistaking it, to render it difficult even for the hypocrite to impose upon himself, and to yield a sure foundation for the hope and confidence of the upright. What therefore is not Gospel-repentance is none: what comes not up to that standard will be rejected, and leave us disappointed and undone. Is it not evident to common sense, that as they who have not the faith the Gospel requires, are unbelievers, that they also whose repentance is not what the Gospel prescribes, are impenitent. Now, if we take our measures and form our sentiments from thence of *that* repentance to which the promise of forgiveness and acceptance is annexed, and *confined* too, we need no more to satisfy us, that what is made necessary for the obtaining them, cannot be exercised under a dying circumstance.

A person in the last stage of life may make very liberal confessions of guilt, he may discover a very melting contrition and
remorse,

remorse, and be very *truly* grieved for a past life; he may wish with *all his heart* that he had listened to the voice of God and conscience, and form very *sincere* resolutions of amendment and reformation, should he be spared. But the Gospel, and the nature of the thing, requires much more than this: that insists upon our *forsaking*, or *breaking off* from our sins as a *deliberate chosen* act, whilst we are capable of following them; but when they have been persisted in until the close of life, it can only be said that *they forsake us*, but with no propriety or truth, *that we have forsaken them*. A *persevering obedience and continuance in well doing*, a *newness of life*, a *walking before God in holiness and righteousness*, the *being holy in all manner of conversation*, or a *conversation becoming the Gospel of Christ*, are indispensibly necessary to the obtaining the favour of God to eternal life. Now, if the Gospel be consistent with itself; if repentance shall be available for forgiveness; these must be *essential* branches of that repentance that shall entitle us to it; or, the *doing the will* of our heavenly father must be included in it. But in what capacity is a dying person for this? how shall he make it good?

The passage of the Apostle just mentioned is but a summary of Gospel repentance †: by that I am willing that the matter should

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† Titus ii. 11, 12.

be determined. Can any one who is afraid of deceiving himself, ever admit the thought, that death bed sorrows and confessions, when opportunity and capacity for sinning ceases, come up to *that denial of ungodliness and worldly lusts* that is required, or that dying penitently amounts to a *sober, righteous, and godly life?*

It may be said, "that though the person is not allowed time for an after obedience, yet if God, who knows his heart, should see his resolutions to be such as would produce it had he lived, he may accept of what he *would do, as actually done.*"

I answer. "This is such a *peradventure*, that no one who understands and believes the importance of the case, and governs his hopes and fears by the Gospel, could ever suggest, or in the least depend upon. The argument is founded upon "God's accepting *the will for the deed.*" Now, if this is true in one circumstance, it doth not follow that it is so in another: since different circumstances constitute quite different cases, and lead to quite different conclusions. And I apprehend, however justly this rule may be applied, whatever consolation it may warrantably yield, in some cases, that yet in the case *before us*, it is actually delusive, and the comfort extracted from it will issue in disappointment. For here

It is supposed that a person hath *already* enjoyed abundant means for repentance, much time and many opportunities for the *execution* of his penitent resolutions; and that his *present want* of time is owing to his having wasted and thrown away what was given, and was abundantly sufficient for, that end, through a resolved indulgence to a course of iniquity. Now supposing, that God did know, and no one else could know, that the purposes of this dying sinner for an amendment and reformation of life would have been performed had he lived, yet what reason is there to think, that his will should be accepted for his deed, or that his purposes should avail him for performances, when the want of opportunity for execution was from *his own default*, and from a *criminal alienation* of the space granted *and lengthened out* for the bringing forth fruits meet for repentance?

Further: the Gospel abundantly declares and insists upon it, that all which can be done for the procuring the divine favour and mercy is *limited to* the present life. When the Apostle expresses his great solicitude that the Corinthians might obtain the blessings of pardon and salvation, to which they were called by the Gospel, he presses upon them the application of the *present time* to that purpose: as if the *immediately* present day

might decide the affair *. In like manner the author to the Hebrews exhorting them to an attention to the divine voice, urges it with that argument, *to day; in that it is said to day*, saith he, you may plainly see the danger of continuing in unbelief and impenitency †. Now, what force is there in this argument, but as it contains an assurance, that our state beyond the grave shall be modelled by what is *actually done* on this side; or that whatever is undone when death puts a period to this life, is of no consideration or avail towards the happiness of another? What probability then is there that God will regard those *late* purposes, however sincere, that are not made, till the Day *appointed* for working is shutting in, and the night is advancing, when the supposed penitent was *assured* there would be no working; and which cannot be proposed to be executed within the season *that God hath set* for those performances that shall be available for his favour and acceptance? And that applications for mercy, and consequently resolutions for obedience, *may be too late*, is evident from the parable of the virgins §.---I would suggest one consideration more, to prove that this rule cannot be justly applied to the case of a death-bed penitent.

Our blessed Lord, hath assured us, *that the word that he hath spoken*, that is, the Gospel,

* 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2. † Heb. iii. 7, 13, 15. § Mat. xxv. 11, 12.

pel, *that very word, shall judge men*, or be the rule of their judgment, who have lived under it, *in the last day* *. By that their characters as entitled to a resurrection of life, or doomed to a resurrection of condemnation shall be settled: no other measures will be taken in the display of mercy and justice, but what are therein laid down. Now, where is there the least intimation in the account that we have of the process of that day, that God will deal with any according to what they *might*, or *would hereafter* be and do, or that he will accept of the *resolution* of the dying sinner, for a future life of obedience, where he knew that it would have been executed had he lived longer? The repeated express declarations relating to that day of decision and doom look quite another way. We are told that we are to give an account of what we *have done*, whilst we were in this *bodily state* †. They are *past* actions that *have been* done, and not any *foreseen futurities*, by which the final sentence shall be governed. So that should the dying sinner's will be accepted for his deeds, I see not how he could be judged for *his works*, which the Gospel constantly declares shall be the case: for we are not called to *will*, but to *work out* our salvation: nor can I understand to what end a time should be *allotted* for the obtaining pardon and *salvation*;

* John xii. 48.

† 2 Cor. v. 10.

tion; nor why there should be such pressing calls to apply it thereto, with the strongest intimations that what was done for the procuring the divine mercy must be done *within the limited space*, if at the same time what was *never done* shall answer the same end, or if *meer will and intention* shall prove as successful as practice and performance. In short, if this be true, we may enter into life *without keeping the commandments*.

From hence surely we may draw this conclusion; that saving repentance was never *calculated* for a sick and dying circumstance: it *fruits* nothing but life, properly so called, or a capacity for an amendment by a course of actions. This very probably is the reason, why what is exercised at such a season is not *expressly*, or in *so many words*, declared in the Gospel to be invalid; because it supposes that those who take their sentiments of it from the standard, must see that what is of real worth and of chief importance in repentance, is impracticable at such a season; and that were we but as solicitous about the divine acceptance, and as fearful of a disappointment, as might be expected from reasonable creatures, we never could rest our hopes of mercy, upon a repentance in *the close of life*.

As justly may we draw another conclusion, namely, that it is folly even to madness to expose our eternal salvation to such an hazard,

as is done by putting it upon the validity and acceptance of a death-bed repentance. For, let us consider—Is not *repentance unto life* an affair of that nature and moment, as to require the most calm and composed mind; the best capacity of reflecting on our ways, of forming the truest judgment of ourselves, of executing resolutions of amendment, and evidencing the change of the mind by the holiness and obedience of the life? Is that then the most *convenient* season for this, when the attention of the mind is generally broken, and called off by the maladies that the body sustains; or when, if there be any penitent reflections, the mind is likely to be overwhelmed with the greatness of the work that it hath to do, and the shortness of the space that it hath for the doing it?—Doth not our own observation furnish us with a variety of ways, whereby the life of man is brought to a period, which leave no opportunity or possibility of exercising any of those thoughts, or performing those acts, which we now propose and promise to ourselves, in order to procure the divine acceptance? Can any one insure it to us, that the disorder that sends us to our graves, shall not at first seize our brain, and deprive us of understanding and senses at once? Or that the *man* shall not dye, before the body is without breath? Have we not many instances of persons being snatched away with-

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out time or capacity for putting up those cries for mercy, upon which they have suspended all their hopes of it? Have not many fixed upon an *hereafter* to prepare for an exchange of worlds, who have made that exchange without knowing any thing of their going, or that they were near their removal? What then could they contribute towards an happy one?---Why hath our great disposer, in whose hand our life and breath is, thrown a veil upon futurity, and hid the time, with every circumstance in the manner, of our dying from us? Was it not to prevent our postponing, what the general sense of mankind unites in acknowledging to be absolutely necessary to our final acceptance, and to proclaim the delusion of *depending* upon any future promises and resolutions that we can make to ourselves about it? Upon the most impartial view of the case, I cannot but subscribe to what a *truly honourable* person saith, "That
 " for any to think a sick-bed a fit time to begin repentance, which may well employ
 " the whole man in his calmest state of mind,
 " is a delirium as great as any that distemper
 " may occasion."---Methinks, it is very desirable to be *satisfied* of the truth of our repentance, when all our hopes of an happy issue depend upon what the Gospel hath pronounced to be true and genuine: but how shall we attain such a satisfaction at the supposed

posed season? by what evidences shall we be able to assure our own hearts, that our prayers and remorse, our declarations and resolves, are the fruits of a real change of judgment, will, and affections, and not the effects of distress and consternation? or that they flow from religious principles and convictions, and are not merely extorted, like the vows of the mariner in a tempest, by the near apprehensions of death, and the horror of the state to which that may consign us? Whatever symptoms of repentance are found in persons under the near views of death, contrary to the whole tenor of a preceeding life, they may justly be suspected *by themselves*; from the many instances of the most solemn vows and resolutions of amendment, that have been forgotten and violated, upon a recovery from those disorders and dangers that produced them. I know of no test that such circumstances admit of, from whence the mind may derive a substantial satisfaction as to the goodness of the principle, or the sincerity of the acts. And oh! what an heart-ach may *doubts* about our repentance excite when an eternity is in view! How painful is meer *uncertainty*, when a person hath an happy or miserable immortality just before them! I heartily wish that the dying sinner may find the mercy that he seeks and needs: Nor can he do better in such a circumstance

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than to implore it, with the most humble and hearty acknowledgments of his ungrateful and aggravated disobedience: But surely it is neither rational pity, nor christian charity, to speak peace to those, to whom the Gospel speaks terror; nor will any pretences of preventing the dying sinner's despair, justify the encouraging of the living sinner's presumption. It is the latter that is the *cause* of the former: and therefore it is so far from being tenderness and compassion, that it is the greatest instance of cruelty, to our own and others souls, to encourage their indulging a hope of mercy for which the Gospel yields no ground: And it can be no other than delusion to apply or take sanctuary, in the instance we have considered, as establishing the validity of a *late* repentance; since if that was the design, it would be an actual repealing the laws of the Gospel, and the *declared* conditions of salvation; at the same time giving a standing encouragement to an unrestrained licentiousness. For what need is there of going thro' the struggles and self-denials, the watchfulness and circumspection, which is required to a genuine and saving repentance, when the same happiness may be secured by prayers and tears at the close of life, and a life too of absolute indulgence?

The obvious instruction from all that hath been said is this, and if it hath been just, it is at the hazard of our eternal hopes to disregard it, namely, that we consider and improve life, (what deserves to be so called) *as the space for repentance* ; given and lengthened out by the Lord of our lives for that very end *, the application of which is under his strict observation ; the measure of which is governed absolutely by his will ; whilst it is the only state of probation and tryal for an eternity before us. Oh ! may we never trust to any thing as the ground of our future expectations, but what the Gospel warrants and a judgment day will confirm ! Our Lord will ever own and ratify his own declarations, whilst he will never depart from them : But as for our own inventions, the more confidently they are relied upon, the greater disappointment will they leave us under. Surely the state of that creature must be desperate and deplorable, whose hope of acceptance depends upon God's dispensing with his own established terms ! And how much better is that hope which is grounded on a penitent death, instead of an holy and obedient Life ? If we are wise and would be happy at last, let us seek the Lord whilst we are *sure* he may be found, and call upon him, whilst we are *sure* he

he is near : Let us give glory to him, and provide for our own present satisfaction and future safety, before he cause darkness, and before our feet stumble upon the dark mountains. For, however we are deceived, God is not to be mocked ; but, whatsoever we now sow, that shall we also reap.

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